



Pick Your Path to Health

Prescription Drug Abuse

If you've ever had a nagging feeling that you need to cut down on your use of prescription drugs or you use them as you choose and not as they were prescribed, you may be one of the estimated 9 million people abusing prescription drugs in the United States.

"This is a dangerous new drug abuse trend," says Alan I. Leshner, Ph.D., director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. "While prescription drugs can relieve a variety of medical problems and improve the lives of millions, they can be dangerous, addicting and even deadly when used non-medically. We're trying to fend off what could become another public health crisis."

Indeed, the number of new abusers of prescription medications has increased 300 percent since the 1980s. Seventeen percent of Americans 60 and older are believed to be abusing prescription drugs, while the most dramatic increase in new users is among young people aged 12 to 25.

Although men and women have similar rates of non-medical use of prescription drugs, young women aged 12-17 are more likely than young men to abuse psychotherapeutic drugs (such as pain killers, tranquilizers, sedatives, and stimulants).

The misuse of prescription drugs is particularly worrisome in women. Studies suggest that women are more likely than men to be prescribed an abusable prescription drug, particularly narcotics (such as pain killers and analgesics) and anti-anxiety medications.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has developed a major public awareness campaign to educate women and their families about how to use medicines properly. The *Women's Health: Take Time To Care* campaign features *My Medicines*, a brochure which includes tips about taking medicines correctly as well as a medicine tracking chart which you can keep in your purse for easy access. The brochure is available in English, Spanish, and many other languages at <http://www.fda.gov/womens/taketimetocare/mymeds.html>

There is no "typical abuser," and even if you do not abuse prescription drugs, it is important to learn to use drugs correctly. If you are misusing

any particular drug, seeking help from your health care provider is important for your safety.

When a doctor prescribes a pain medication (such as codeine), a stimulant (such as amphetamine or caffeine), or a CNS depressant (such as tranquilizers or sleep-inducers), follow the directions carefully and learn about the effects the drug could have, especially during the first few days when your body is adapting to the medication. Read all the information provided by the pharmacist to learn of potential interactions with other drugs.

Do not increase or decrease or stop taking a prescription without consulting your health care provider. Patients addicted to barbiturates (used to treat anxiety, tension, and sleep disorders) and benzodiazepines (used to treat anxiety, acute stress reactions, panic attacks, and sleep disorders), for example, could suffer withdrawal symptoms or possible life-threatening complications.

Prescription drugs should not be combined with alcohol or with over-the-counter medicines, such as some cold and allergy medications without consulting with your care provider.

And remember:

- Take exactly the amount of drug prescribed by your doctor.
- Don't take drugs prescribed for friends or relatives.
- Tell your doctor about problems you have had with drugs such as rashes, indigestion, dizziness or lack of appetite.
- Keep a daily record of the drugs you take, especially if your treatment schedule is complicated.
- Throw out old medicines.
- Call your doctor right away if you notice unusual reactions.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about side effects, about special rules for storage, and about foods or beverages, if any, to avoid.

If you are addicted to prescription drugs, there are behavior and medication treatments available. Behavioral treatments teach people how to function without drugs, how to handle cravings, and how to prevent and handle a relapse should it occur. Medications can treat addictions to certain drugs such as pain medication by reversing the effects of the drug on the brain and behavior.

Remember that medications should always be used properly to help improve your health. Freeing yourself from addictive behaviors will lead you down a path to better health.

To learn more, contact the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at (800) 729-6686 or click onto www.4woman.gov for a comprehensive listing of resources.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."